DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 705 EA 031 419

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TITLE Issues Concerning Public School Dropouts in South Texas.
INSTITUTION Texas A and M Univ., Corpus Christi. South Texas Research and Development Center.
PUB DATE 2000-06-00
NOTE 59p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Tests/Questionnaires (160)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Dropout Rate; *Dropout Research; *Dropouts; High Schools; *Public Schools; *Student Attrition
IDENTIFIERS *Texas

ABSTRACT

The identification of dropouts and dropout rates, the characteristics of students who drop out, and their reasons for leaving high school are not easily determined. A study examined the perceptions of school district personnel regarding the annual dropout rate and the longitudinal dropout rate in the 38 districts of Regions 1 and 2 of Texas. It attempted to determine what procedures are used to identify student dropouts, how personnel perceive the accuracy of the annual dropout rate reported by the state's Academic Excellence Indicator System, whether the annual or longitudinal calculation is preferred, and what problems exist in developing a procedure for the longitudinal calculation. A survey instrument was developed and sent to principals of high schools. The survey consisted of yes-or-no questions, open-ended comments, multiple-choice questions, and a checklist. The data received are depicted as frequency distributions, percentages, and number of responses, often in graph and chart format. The longitudinal rate appears to be more likely to be accurate, but student mobility is one of the most difficult variables to control. It is very difficult to track students who leave the state or never show up for school. Appendixes include: Letter to Superintendents, Consent Form from Superintendent, Letter to Principals, Survey to high School Principals, and Survey of Dropout Procedures in Regions 1 and 2 Results. (Contains 24 references.) (RKJ)

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Prepared by

Wynette Johnson
Linda Thomas
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June 2000

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ISSUES CONCERNING PUBLIC SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN TEXAS

Wynette Johnson, Linda Thomas, and Ping-Jung Tintera

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of school district personnel regarding the annual dropout rate and the longitudinal dropout rate.

The significance of this study is that the data gathered will indicate the perceptions of school administrators in Regions 1 and 2 in Texas regarding the dropout rate. The study will provide additional information about identification procedures and areas of considerations for the calculation of dropout rates.

The target population was principals of traditional high schools in 38 districts in Regions 1 and 2. The survey instrument was developed based on the review of the literature on the dropout rate. The survey was conducted by mailed questionnaire and was sent to high school principals whose superintendents had signed consent forms. The survey consisted of Yes \ No questions, open-ended comments, a checklist, and multiple-choice questions.

Descriptive methods were used to analyze the data and depict as frequency distributions, percentages, and number of responses. Graphs and charts were used to conclude and display the results from the surveys. Each of the survey responses was analyzed and recorded based on the research questions.

The results indicated that majority of high school principals perceived that the longitudinal dropout rate and annual dropout rate were accurate for their high school. A slightly higher number of high school principals preferred the annual dropout rate, thirteen, as compared to eight principals who preferred the longitudinal rate; two personnel preferred both rates to be used; three did not response.

The most frequently indicated procedures for dropout identification were letter mailings and telephone inquiry. The data revealed that high schools do have procedures in place for identification of dropouts.

Because of the difficulty of controlling some variables, such as mobility, it is almost impossible to calculate a dropout rate with one hundred percent accuracy. They also noted that the dropout rate given at one point is not entirely accurate due to the variations that happen after that date such as dropout recovery. The longitudinal dropout rate appears to be more likely to be accurate but student mobility is one of the most difficult variables to control.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

One of the greatest concerns in the nation today is the number of dropouts from the public schools. The public is concerned about dropouts because it is a function of the schools to produce an independent citizenry who are capable of earning a living and functioning in society. In their analysis of national dropout information, the Educational Testing Service concluded that dropouts earned about one-third less annually than high school graduates. Over a lifetime, dropouts earned $212,000 less than high school graduates and $812,00 less than college graduates (Schwartz, 1995). A great deal of time and energy has been spent to examine the numbers and percentages of students who drop out, to examine who drops out, and to study the reasons for dropping out.

Nationally, the magnitude of the dropout problem has been evidenced by the large numbers of students who have left school without obtaining their high school diplomas. 3.9 million students were not enrolled in a high school during October of 1998 (Kaufman, Kwon, Klein, and Chapman, 1999). Nationally, as well as in Texas, the highest percentages of dropouts are Hispanic. The dropout rates are high for all students regionally with a twenty-two percent dropout rate for the West

Region of the United States and thirty-four percent for the South Region of the United States (Kaufman et. al., 1999).

In Texas, legislators and educators have moved beyond the examination of the data to make Texas public schools accountable for the annual dropout rates of their schools. The dropout rate is a part of the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), commonly referred to as the School Report Card, that is used to indicate the accreditation status of the schools. The AEIS reporting also includes how well all groups of students are performing on the state assessment instrument and the attendance rates, as well as additional indicators. The annual dropout rate as indicated in the accountability rating standards for all students and each student group are: 1.0% or less is considered exemplary, 3.5% or less is considered recognized, 6.0% is considered academically acceptable, and above 6.0% is considered academically unacceptable/low performing (Nelson, 1999). In addition, the Texas Education Agency is beginning to track students who complete high school using a longitudinal measure to report a completion rate.

The Problem

Motivated by the desire to obtain accurate data, Texas has progressed to the implementation of an explicit coding system to identify student dropouts for data collection purposes. Dropout rates are generated from the data that is provided by schools. However, the accuracy of the data is being questioned. Critics have been

questioning whether the annual dropout rates accurately depicted the true picture of a school's dropout situation (Policy Research by TEA, October 1996, p.1). Skepticism exists regarding the confidence in the data and there are still many unanswered questions. The main question has been that the dropout rates are getting lower but other indications such as student completion rate remain high. A review of the Texas Education Agency by the state auditor reported that there was inaccuracy in the counting and reporting of drop out data (Johnson, 1999). A press release from the Texas Education Agency in February of 2000 revealed that a review of student files caused accountability rating to be changed in four districts in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2000). Texas Education Agency audited districts that had a difference of either 10 percent or more than 1,000 students in grades seven through twelve who were no longer on the attendance rolls without an explanation (TEA, 2000). As a result of the visit, one Texas high school received a rating of acceptable and data issues which indicated "flawed data" (TEA, 2000, p. 1). Several other Texas high schools had unreported students that were found to be dropouts (TEA, 2000, p. 2). A total of four school districts in Texas have the rating of "unacceptable: data quality because of serious concerns about the accuracy of their initial data submission" (TEA, 2000, p. 2).

In addition to the annual drop out rates, concerns have emerged regarding the calculation of the longitudinal reporting measures of high school completion

rates. Educators have noticed a disparity between the reported annual dropout rate and the longitudinal completer rate. The numbers of students graduating from twelfth grade are considerably less in number than the number of ninth graders entering high school.

Two studies have pointed out that there is a problem that needs further exploration. A study has done by a math professor at Baylor University revealed that even though about 300,000 students enter first grade each year, about half that number graduates each year (Reynolds and Odell, 1999). The Texas Education Agency initiated research to study longitudinal measures due to the criticisms of the annual rate (Policy Research, 1996). The research regarding the calculation of the dropout rate has revealed a need for investigation of the disparity between what professionals in the field believe to be the actual dropout rate and the reported dropout rate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of school district personnel regarding the annual dropout rate and the longitudinal dropout rate. The research questions for this study are:

1. What procedures are used in public schools to identify student dropouts?
2. Do school district personnel feel that the annual dropout rate reported in the AEIS report is accurate?
3. Do school personnel perceive that the longitudinal dropout rate is correct?
4. Do school district personnel prefer the annual or longitudinal method for the reported calculation of dropouts?
5. What are the problems in developing a procedure for calculating a longitudinal dropout rate?

Importance of the Study

Educators have suspected that the reported data on dropouts is not accurate. The study of the dropout rate will inform educators about whether or not the high school principals perceive that the data that has been reported is accurate. The study will indicate the perceptions of school administrators in Regions 1 and 2 in Texas regarding the dropout rate and will provide additional information about identification procedures and areas of considerations. The study should also reveal whether the principals prefer the annual or the longitudinal dropout rate. The study

will also inform state agency personnel about perceptions of practitioners in the field.

Limitations of the Study

The study is a sampling only and will not represent all high school principals in Texas. Only high school principals of traditional high schools in Regions 1 and 2 in Texas were surveyed. Charter schools and alternative schools were not surveyed. The study was not designed to survey high schools that are representative of specific sizes of high schools or of any specific demographics. Respondents were asked to respond to a topic that is scrutinized in schools and affects their accountability ratings. Since the topic is a sensitive issue, some respondents may have been reluctant to complete the survey.

Definitions

AEIS

Academic Excellence Indicator System. To determine accountability ratings for Texas public school districts and campuses. (Report on Texas Public School Dropouts 1996-97)

Annual dropout rate

The rate is calculated by dividing the number of dropouts over a full school year by cumulative attendance that same year in grades 7th -12th. (Report on Texas Public School Dropouts, 1999)

Attrition rate

The attrition rate compares the difference between 9th grade enrollment in Year 1 and 12th grade enrollment four years later, often with a mathematical adjustment made for enrollment growth. (Interim Report on Texas Public Schools, 1999)

Completers

Any students who, at the end of the four-year period (9-12 grades): (1) have graduated, either on time or early; (2) have received a General Educational Development (GED) certificate; or (3) are found to be enrolled in school during the year following their anticipated graduation. (High school completion rates, 1996-97)

Cumulative enrollment

The count of all students reported in attendance during any six-week reporting period. (Report on Texas Public School Dropouts, 1996-97)

Dropout

The individual is " absent without an approved excuse or documented transfer and does not return to school by the fall of the following year, or if he or she completes the school year but fails to re-enroll the following school year."

Formula for dropout

The standard formula form from the Texas Educational Agency.

Longitudinal dropout rate

The rate is calculated by counting the number of students from a 7th grade cohort who dropped out by the end of their expected graduation year, divided by the number of students in the cohort. (Interim Report on Texas Public Schools, 1999)

GED

General Educational Development. A non-state-approved program which permits dropouts to get a certificate of equivalency to high school by an alternative route. (Public School Dropouts, 1997-98)

IDRA

Intercultural Development Research Association. A non-profit organization with a 501C(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminated information concerning equality of educational opportunity. (IDRA Newsletter, 1999)

PEIMS

Public Education Information Management System. Collects comprehensive and detailed information that reflects public education activity in enrollment. (Report on Texas Public School Dropouts, 1996-97)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The problem of dropouts has been a concern in Texas that has been investigated by identifying who drops out, the reasons for dropping out, and programs that are successful for dropout recovery and prevention. Only a small body of literature is accessible regarding the calculation of the dropout rate. The literature that is available concerning the dropout rate includes the use of the dropout rate, the inaccuracy of the reported dropout data, dropout rate reporting, the dropout definition, and new approaches to reporting dropouts.

Background Information

In Texas, the accountability system for public schools, the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) has been used as the performance criteria to rate the accreditation status of districts and campuses. Included in the AEIS are the Texas Assessment of Academic Skill (TAAS), dropout rates, and attendance rates. Because schools can be rated low performing if students do not meet minimum standards, these performance accountability ratings are viewed as indicators of performance success (TEA, 1999, p. 1).

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has formally reported to the Governor and the Speaker of the House that the annual dropout rate of public school students has dramatically decreased from 6.1% in 1988-89 to 1.6% in 1997-98

(Interim Report on Texas Public Schools, 1999). An actual longitudinal dropout rate was calculated for the first time by Texas Education Agency (TEA) during the 1999-2000 school year. It was calculated by counting the number of students from a 7th grade cohort who dropped out by the end of their expected graduation year, divided by the number of students in the cohort. The "benchmark" value of the actual longitudinal dropout rate for the state as a whole was 14.7 percent. The longitudinal dropout rate also is prepared at the district and county levels (Interim report on Texas Public Schools, 1999).

Inaccuracy of the Reported Dropout Data

Inaccurate reporting and nonstandardized reporting procedures contribute to the problem of obtaining accurate dropout rates (Fossey, 1996). Fossey examined data from the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) and found that the annual dropout rate did not correlate to the four-year dropout rate. Based on this finding, Fossey assumed that the nation's high school dropout rate might not be true (Fossey, 1996).

In California, Kollars recounted that the state schools chief reported the annual high school dropout rate for 1997-98 as thirteen percent. When comparing the annual dropout rate to the actual high school graduation, the four-year dropout rate ranges near thirty percent (Kollars, 1998). In her article, Kollars quoted

Haycock, Director of the Urban Trust, that California's method of counting dropouts is "convoluted and unreliable" (Kollars, 1998, p.1).

A Louisiana school district reported that only twenty-two of its twenty-nine thousand students had dropped out in one year resulting in a two-tenths of 1% annual dropout rate. Other conflicting school information indicated that thirty-seven percent of the cohort of ninth graders failed to graduate on time so the district's annual dropout rate had to be incorrect (Fossey, 1996).

A study of a Ninth-Grade Cohort, 1993-94 through 1997-98, conducted in Austin ISD in Austin, Texas, revealed problems with the dropout reporting. The study findings pointed out that students were underreported when providing information for the annual dropout rate. However, the resulting longitudinal dropout rate for the cohort four years later was greater than expected due to the initial underreporting of dropouts. According to the study, the causes of the underreporting were due to procedural and structural problems in the student data system, failure to keep up to date with the changes in required dropout reporting for Texas, and failure to update computer software technology to accurately report the dropout data (Austin Study, 1998).

The Corpus Christi Caller-Times in December 1999 quoted Jay Smink, Executive Director of the National Dropout Prevention Center, as saying that every state underestimates the dropout rate. Smink stated that the U. S. Department of

Education and the National Center for Education Statistics quoted an annual dropout rate of 42% for the 1995-96 school year as compared to the annual dropout rate of 1.8% calculated and reported by the Texas Education Agency for 1995-96 (Falkenberg, 1999). In the same article, a TEA spokesperson stated that the difference was due to calculation methods (Falkenberg, 1999).

The State Auditor's Report of 1996 indicated that Texas school districts were underreporting dropouts (Texas Education Today, 1999). The inaccuracy of the counting and reporting of data for dropouts was emphasized as a result of a July 1996 review of the Texas Education Agency. The longitudinal dropout rate has declined but the changes in the definition of a dropout and the changes in the ways of counting have been suspected as reasons for the reduction (Kidscount, 1999). The Texas state auditor estimated that the actual dropout rate for 1994 was more than double the reported rate (Johnson, 1999). An examination of the data reported to the Texas Education Agency by school district points out that the number of dropouts dropped dramatically with 91,307 reported in 1987-88 as compared to 29,918 reported in 1994-95 (Johnson, 1996). The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) conducted an analysis that examined numbers of students who did not graduate indicates some extremely different results (Johnson, 1996). The majority of lost students were Hispanic, and more males dropped out than females (Johnson, 1996). From 1985-86 to 1998-99, the attrition rate findings

indicated that 1.3 million students in Texas were lost from the schools and two of every five ninth grade students did not graduate (Johnson, 1999). The numbers of Black and Hispanic students who drop out are still high with Hispanic students 1.7 times more likely to drop out than White students (Johnson, 1999).

Inaccurate reporting and nonstandardized reporting procedures contribute to the problem of obtaining accurate dropout rates (Fossey, 1996). Fossey examined data from the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) and found that the annual dropout rate did not correlate to the four-year dropout rate. He concluded that the general assumption that the nation's high school dropout rate might not be true.

Schwartz questioned whether it is possible to calculate an accurate dropout rate. Schwartz stated that after the event/or snapshot date that is used to calculate the rate, some of the students are recovered and continue to attend school (Schwartz, 1995). In their 1996-97 Report on High School Completion Rates, the Texas Education Agency also stated that the completion rate is not directly comparable to the dropout rate because the annual dropout rate measures only the event in a single school year whereas the "completion rate is a longitudinal measure that looks at the final dispositions of members in a cohort over a four-year period" (1996-97 Report on High School Completion Rates, 1999). The Texas Education Agency also stated that the annual dropout rate applies to Grades seven

through twelve and the completion rate applies to Grades nine through twelve (1996-97 Report on High School Completion Rates, 1999).

Dropout Rate Reporting

In 1996, the Texas commissioner of education initiated a research study to investigate the possibility of replacing the dropout rate with the school completion rate because the critics of the annual dropout rate were saying that the indicator did not provide a "true" picture of what happened to a cohort of students. The findings indicated that there were data collection issues with the way that dropouts were reported and with linking student data (Texas Education Agency, 1996). National information shows that as of October 1998, schools could not account for five out of every one hundred students which indicates that these students did complete their high school course of study (Kaufman, Kwon, Klein, Chapman, 1999). Attrition rates show a forty-two percent overall attrition rate for Texas public schools and a forty-three percent attrition rate for Nueces County (IDRA, 1999). According to Johnson, the attrition rate is "the percent of students lost from enrollment" (Johnson, 1999). The data shows that a high number of students are being lost from Texas schools (Johnson, 1999).

Fossey wrote that the dropout rate must be reported accurately because

- Better strategies need to be developed for helping dropouts to be more successful, and

- Inadequate reporting hinders the evaluation of school reform efforts (Fossey, 1996).

Dropout Definition

The term dropout has different meanings to different people. According to the dropout rate terminology used by TEA, apparently this term has meaning primarily to TEA personnel and to local district administrators. But it does not mean the difference one computes by subtracting the number of students starting the first grade from the number of those first graders who graduate from high school eleven years later.

The annual dropout rate in Texas is based on the students in Grades seven though twelve that the school district reports as dropouts through the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) (Texas Public School Dropout Report, 1997). According to the Texas Education Agency definition, students are dropouts in Grades seven through twelve if they (1)are absent without approved excuses or documented transfers and do not return to school by the fall of the following year or (2) complete the school year but fail to reenroll the following school year" (Texas Public School Dropout Report, 1997).

The term, dropout, and the meaning of the term, dropout, was questioned in a recent study conducted at Baylor University on academic casualties. The report

pointed out that the dropout rate has been decreasing due to the changing definition of the term, dropout, and that a dropout rate does not mean the difference between those who start first grade and the graduates from high school (Reynolds and Odell, 1996).

New Approaches to Reporting Dropouts

The National Center for Education Statistics published ***A Recommended Approach to Providing High School Dropout and Completion Rates at the State Level*** in January 2000. Their findings indicate that states typically use a snapshot count of completers to indicate their dropout rates. Some states are using nonstandard approaches which are adjusted in order to compare them to NCES approaches (Winglee, Marker, Henderson, Young, and Hoffman, 2000).

The Texas Education Agency has developed a new student record, called the leaver report, in response to the State Auditor's Report of 1996 that indicated that school districts were underreporting dropouts (Texas Education Today, 1999). The leaver report is intended to give more detailed information on non-returning students by providing at least one reason for departure (Texas Education Today, 1999). The new leaver reason codes are much more detailed and ask for documentation of the reasons for withdrawal. The reason for leaving include:

- pregnancy,
- marriage,

- alcohol or other abuse problems,
- poor attendance, homelessness or non-permanent residency,
- language problems, age, to pursue a job, failed TAAS, expelled,
- and low or failing grades (Nelson, 1999).

Summary of the Literature

The literature review revealed that, in Texas, the dropout rates of school district impact greatly a school's accountability rating. The school's dropout rate could cause a school to become identified as low performing. In the struggle to raise the accountability rating, educators have discussed the dropout rate and its role as a contributing factor to identification as low performing.

How the dropout rate is calculated and how the dropout is identified affects the numbers and percentages of dropouts. Additionally, the accuracy of the annual dropout rates, as well as the longitudinal dropout rate accuracy have been challenged by educators. Austin Independent School District had revealed the inaccuracy of the data reported and concluded that students were underreported. The State Auditor's Report in 1996 verified that Texas school districts were underreporting dropouts.

The school completion rate was also studied by the Texas Education Agency and resulted in the leaver report being initiated. The new reporting is much more detailed in coding school leavers accurately.

Chapter 3: Procedures

Introduction

Chapter Three describes the procedures utilized to conduct the research study. Topics included are descriptions of the research design, the sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

Research Design

A survey research design was used in this study to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey, used in nonexperimental research, was used by the investigators to collect information from a selected group of respondents which will be analyzed regarding the answers to the research questions (McMillan, 2000).

Sample Selection

The target population for the research study are all traditional high schools in Texas because the annual and longitudinal dropouts rate information is collected from these high schools. Charter schools were not selected because the Charter schools in Regions 1 and 2 have been in operation three years or less. Alternative high schools were not included in the sample. Regions 1 and 2 are most accessible to the investigators as Texas A & M University is located in Region 2 and Region 1 is located nearby. All high school principals of traditional schools in Regions 1 and 2 were selected for a convenience sample. The high school principals were not randomly sampled. The survey of thirty-nine Region 2 schools were initially

selected and thirty-eight schools from Region 1 were added within a week of the Region 2 selection to increase the accessible population. Twenty-six respondents returned the surveys.

Instrumentation

The instrument for data collection was a two-page survey (Appendix A) consisting of ten quantitative and qualitative questions. Perceptions were gathered regarding the accuracy of the annual dropout rate and the longitudinal dropout rate reported to the Texas Education Agency through the PEIMS reporting. The survey was constructed for ease of use by the respondent.

The first page included descriptive information about the job title of respondent and the size of district. The questions asked for qualitative responses and quantitative responses. Quantitative questions included the opportunity for survey respondents to provide additional comments. The qualitative questions were designed to gain perceptions of the high school principals as well as to obtain information for the development of a longitudinal dropout rate. For example, the survey asked whether or not the school district used an alternative method for calculating the annual dropout rate, whether the longitudinal rate reported in AEIS was correct, and whether or not their district calculated a longitudinal dropout rate. The survey also asked questions for factors that should be considered in developing a procedure for the calculation of a longitudinal dropout rate and asked

for respondents to identify major problems that must be solved in order to calculate a longitudinal dropout rate.

The survey was field tested through review of the survey questions by practicing school administrators, a federal program director, a curriculum director, and a reading specialist.

Data Collection

Seventy-seven letters (Appendix A) were mailed to superintendents in Regions 1 and 2 requesting consent to survey their high school principal. Upon receipt of the completed consent form (Appendix B), a cover letter (Appendix D) and the survey (Appendix C) were mailed to the high school principals.

Follow up phone calls and faxes were sent to Regions 1 and 2 superintendents to request the consent form. Additional phone calls were made and faxes were sent to increase the responses. Four principals were contacted personally to request the return of the surveys. Surveys were received until the end of April 2000.

A total of twenty-six respondents out of seventy-seven, or thirty-three percent, returned the survey and participated in the study. Most of the surveys were completed by the high school principal. However, in some cases other personnel in the high school completed the survey. Three superintendents, two assistant

superintendents, two counselors, and one academic facilitator completed the surveys.

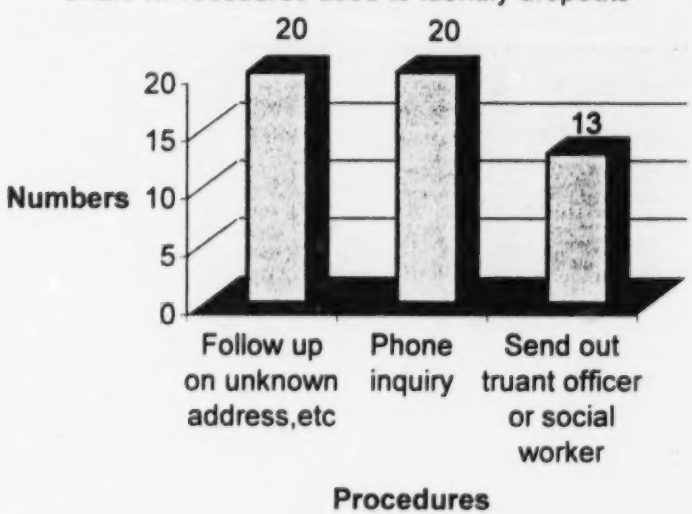
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected in the descriptive study. Survey results will be presented using frequencies and percent of responses by category. The results of the survey are provided for every research question. Charts and graphs are provided to illustrate some of the quantitative answers. Important points of the qualitative answers are given. The complete survey results are included in Appendix E.

Research Question 1: What procedures are used in public schools to identify dropouts?

Chart 1 shows the procedures to identify dropouts in public schools.

Chart 1.Procedures used to identify dropouts



The principals were given four answer choices to indicate the procedures used with one of the choices as "Other." Even though the schools used a variety of procedures to identify dropouts, most of the schools indicated phone inquiry and follow up on known addresses as the most prevalent procedures. Within the "other" category, the schools described telephone and letter contacts most frequently. The school personnel phoned relatives and sent out letters, some of those to schools in which the students indicated intended enrollment. Chart 1 represents the number of schools who sent out the truant officer or social worker, phone inquiry, follow up on known addresses, and letter contacts.

The quantitative category elicited the major procedures as telephone contact, letter contact, and parent conferences.

Research Question 2: Do school district personnel feel that the annual dropout rate reported in the AEIS is accurate?

In order to answer the research question, the high school principals were asked to answer three questions: 1) whether or not the annual dropout rate given by the Texas Education Agency was accurate, 2) whether the actual annual dropout rate was higher or lower than the annual rate reported in the AEIS, and 3) whether the school used an alternate method to calculate the rate. Table 1 presents the answers of respondents to the three questions.

Table 1.

	Yes	No	
Is annual TEA dropout rate Reported in your AEIS accurate?	65.38%	34.62%	
Do you use an alternative method for calculating your annual dropout rate?	Yes 5%	No 95%	
If your actual dropout rate differs from the reported annual dropout rate in 1998-99 AEIS report, is your actual dropout rate	Higher (25%)	Lower (25%)	No response/NA (50%)

As shown in Table 1, 65.38% of respondents indicated that the annual dropout rate reported in the AEIS report was accurate, however a total of fifty percent indicated that the actual rate was either higher or lower. Nine school district personnel, 34.62% of respondents, answered that the dropout rate was not correct. Reasons given for the incorrect dropout rate were that the AEIS is only a snapshot and some students are recovered after the snapshot date. Also, as shown in Table 1, only five percent of the respondents indicated an alternate method of calculation was used so the answers seem to have been based on perceptions.

Research Question 3: Do school personnel perceive that the longitudinal dropout rate is accurate?

In order to determine whether the respondents perceived that the longitudinal rate is accurate, two questions were included in the survey. The respondents were asked whether the district longitudinal rate was correct and whether the district calculated a longitudinal dropout rate. Table 2 presents the percentages of correct and incorrect district longitudinal rates and the percentages of high school personnel who calculate their own longitudinal rate.

Table 2. Longitudinal Dropout Rate

	Yes	No
Is your longitudinal dropout rate in the AEIS correct?	78.3%	21.7%
Does your district calculate a longitudinal dropout rate?	29.2%	70.8%

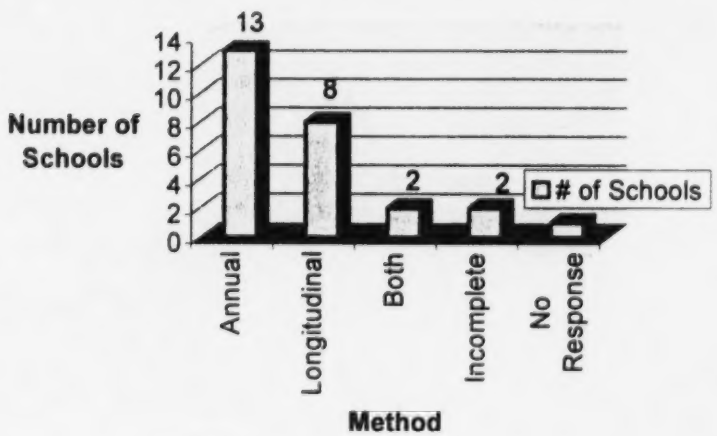
As shown in Table 2, 78.3% of the respondents indicated that the district longitudinal rate was correct as compared to 70.8% who answered that the district did not calculate a longitudinal rate. Again, it seems that the answer was based on perceptions only because the majority of schools do not calculate the longitudinal rate. Table 2 shows that 21.7% of respondents answered that the longitudinal rate

was not correct and a similar percentage, 29.2%, indicated that the district calculated a longitudinal dropout rate. Reasons given by survey respondents for the difference between the rates were that 1) TEA's method of calculating the longitudinal dropout rate does not consider those students who take more than six years to complete grades 7 - 12, 2) the high mobility rate, and 3) the Texas Education Agency rate is based on a one time snapshot and the actual longitudinal rate should be higher.

Research Question 4: Do school district personnel prefer the annual or longitudinal method for the reported calculation of dropouts?

Chart 2 presents the number of respondents who prefer either the annual dropout rate or the longitudinal dropout rate.

Chart 2. Preferred Dropout Rate Calculation for TEA



Thirteen respondents indicated that they preferred the annual dropout rate. Eight respondents indicated that they prefer the longitudinal dropout rate. Two respondents indicated that they preferred both rates to be used.

Research Question 5: What are the problems in developing a procedure for calculating a longitudinal dropout rate?

The respondents were asked to identify the problems and the factors to be considered in developing a procedure for calculating a longitudinal dropout rate. The answers were varied but some of the answers contained similarities. Their responses indicated that the most important factors were student mobility and the tracking of students through PEIMS as a suggestion for improvement. Inaccurate reporting was listed as a problem. Recovery, locating students, funds, and resources were all indicated as factors to be considered. The major problems were tracking students accurately and the recovery system follow-up of dropouts. One district indicated that there were too many variables in developing a longitudinal procedure.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

One of the greatest concerns in the nation today is the number of dropouts from the public schools. The public is concerned about dropouts because it is a function of the schools to produce an independent citizenry who are capable of earning a living and functioning in society. In their analysis of national dropout information, the Educational Testing Service concluded that dropouts earned $212,000 less than high school graduates and $812,000 less than college graduates (Schwartz, 1995). A great deal of time and energy has been spent to examine the numbers and percentages of students who drop out, to examine who drops out, and to study the reasons for dropping out.

Nationally, as well as in Texas, the highest percentages of dropouts are Hispanic. The dropout rates are high for all students regionally with twenty-two percent dropout rate for the West Region of the United States and thirty-four percent for the South Region of the United States (Kaufman, et.al.).

Motivated by the desire to obtain accurate data, Texas has progressed to the implementation of an explicit coding system to identify student dropouts for data collection purposes. Dropout rates are generated from the data that is provided by schools. However, the accuracy of the data is being questioned. Critics have been

questioning whether the annual dropout rates accurately depicted the true picture of a school's dropout situation (Policy research by TEA, October 1996, p. 1).

The lack of research regarding the calculation of the dropout rate has revealed a need for further research regarding the disparity between what professionals in the field believe to be the actual dropout rate and the reported dropout rate.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of schools district personnel regarding the annual dropout rate and the longitudinal dropout rate. The research questions for this study were:

1. What procedures are used in public schools to identify student dropouts?
2. Do school district personnel feel that the annual dropout rate reported in the AEIS report in accurate?
3. Do school personnel perceive that the longitudinal dropout rate is correct?
4. Do school district personnel prefer the annual or longitudinal method for the reported calculation of dropouts?
5. What are the problems in developing a procedure for calculating a longitudinal dropout rate?

There were 32 out of 39 school districts in region 2 that returned the consent forms which is about 80% return rate. In Region 1, 15 out of 38 school districts returned the consent forms which is about 50% return rate. Of those school districts that gave consent for their high schools to be surveyed, 20 high schools

from region 2 which is about 62.5% and 4 high schools from region 1 which is about 26.67%.

Although a variety of answers were given regarding the procedures used to identify dropouts, the most indicated procedures used letter mailings and telephone inquiry. The data indicates that high schools do have procedures in place for identification of dropouts.

The data were inconsistent regarding the annual dropout rate. Seventeen high school personnel indicated that the annual dropout rate was accurate and nine indicated that the rate was not accurate. However, there was a slight discrepancy in the data as shown by twelve high school personnel who indicated that the annual dropout rate was either higher or lower than the 1998 –99 AEIS report. In the qualitative comments, school district personnel indicated that the timing of counting dropouts, which occur during a one time snapshot date, did not account for the recovered dropouts and that the Texas Education Agency doesn't change the percentage unless it affects the AEIS rating. It appears that the rating cannot be taken at face value without more specific knowledge of each high school campus.

Even though seventy-four percent of the high school personnel indicated that they do not calculate a longitudinal rate, seventy seven percent of high schools indicate that the longitudinal rate reported by the Texas Education Agency is correct. The majorities of high school principals perceive that the longitudinal rate

is correct for their high school but do not base their perceptions on data calculations completed by the district.

There was consistency in the data regarding the perceptions that the annual and longitudinal rates were correct as seventeen indicated that the annual dropout rate was correct and eighteen indicated that the longitudinal was correct. A slightly higher number of high school principals preferred the annual dropout rate, thirteen, as compared to eight principals who preferred the longitudinal rate; two personnel preferred both rates to be used.

Conclusions

Because of the difficulty of controlling variables in this dropout identification system, some school districts feel that it is almost impossible to calculate a dropout rate with one hundred percent accuracy.

The rate given at one point is not entirely accurate due to the variations that happen after that date such as dropout recovery. The longitudinal rate appears to be more likely to be accurate but student mobility is one of the most difficult variables to control. It is very difficult to track students who leave the state or never show up for school.

The study identified several issues for further consideration. District personnel, as well as high school principals, would find the following information to be helpful in their practices.

- In the identification of dropouts, high schools could benefit from finding which procedures are most successful.
- In future studies, on-site interviews for data collection should be considered.
- Questions regarding factors and major problems with annual and longitudinal dropout rates could be investigated more thoroughly.

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APPENDIX A

Letter to Superintendents

March 6, 2000

«name», Superintendent
«district»
«street»
«city»

Dear «name»,

A group of students in the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi are studying the Dropout Rate for 7th to 12th graders in South Texas. Of particular concern is the correct coding of the rates by the TEA for districts in Region II.

We are sending this letter to superintendents of selected Region II schools. We need your help by giving your principals permission and encouragement to complete a brief survey. We would like to survey high schools in your district.

With your permission, we will send the survey directly to the high school principals in your district and have them return/fax it directly to us. A copy of the instrument is enclosed with this letter. Responses to the survey instrument will be **strictly confidential**.

The results of this study will be reported to superintendents, principals, and educators in South Texas. A copy of the results of the study will be mailed to you in early June.

The proposed study will include both quantitative and qualitative analyses. We hope that you will agree that the study will be valuable to the educational community in South Texas. Your time in responding and cooperation are most appreciated. Please **sign and fax** the consent form on the next page of this letter by Wednesday **March 8, 2000** or as soon as possible thereafter.

Thank you,

Dr. Thomas H. Linton, Advisor

Mrs. Wynette Johnson Mrs. Linda Thomas Mrs. Ping-Jung Tintera

Cohort VIII, Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
Texas A&M University -Corpus Christi/ Texas A&M University –Kingsville

APPENDIX B

Consent Form from Superintendents

Consent Form

The Dropout Study Group of Cohort VIII of the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi & Texas A&M University-Kingsville has permission to include all the high schools in your School District in the Longitudinal Dropout Study for South Texas. This study is intended to provide a better understanding of the drop out rates and their calculations for 7th to 12th graders in South Texas.

I understand that the Dropout Study Group will survey the high school principals, and that the cumulative results will be available to all educational leaders and educators in South Texas.

I agree to have the high school principals of my district to participate in this effort.

Name of Superintendent	Signature of Superintendent	Date

Please fax this signed form to the attention of **Linda Thomas** at (361) 883-3442 or **Ping-Jung Tintera** at (361) 992-0587 by **March 8, 2000**.

APPENDIX C

Letter to Principals

March 29, 2000

Dear Principal,

A group of students in the Doctoral Program Educational Leadership at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi are studying the Dropout rate in South Texas. Of particular interest is the coding of information that is used by the Texas Education Agency to report Dropout Rates.

We have contacted your superintendent and received permission for you to participate in our study. We need you to help by completing the enclosed brief survey. Individual responses to the survey instrument will be strictly confidential.

The results of this study will be reported to superintendents, principals, and educators in South Texas. A copy of the results of the study will be available in early June.

The proposed study will include both quantitative and qualitative analyses. We hope that you agree that the study will be valuable to the educational community in South Texas. Your time in responding and your cooperation are greatly appreciated. Please **sign and fax** the enclosed survey **by Wednesday March 29, 2000 to Linda Thomas at 361-883-3442** as soon as possible thereafter. Thank you again for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Dr. Thomas H. Linton, Advisor

Mrs. Wynette Johnson
Mrs. Linda Thomas
Mrs. Ping-Jung Tintera

Cohort VIII, Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi/Kingsville

APPENDIX D

Survey to High School Principals

SOUTH TEXAS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY-CORPUS CHRISTI/KINGSVILLE

SURVEY OF DROPOUT PROCEDURES IN REGION 1 and 2

Please answer each question to the best of your ability. Thanks.

A. Which of the following is your job title?

___ Superintendent / Assistant Superintendent ___ Principal

___ Registrar ___ other, _____

B. What is your school population?

___ 0 – 500 ___ 501 – 800

___ 801 – 1200 ___ 1201 – 2000

___ 2000 +

1). Do you feel that the annual TEA dropout rate reported in your AEIS report is accurate?

___ Yes ___ No

If no, please comment: _____

_____

_____.

2). What procedure do you use to identify a student as a dropout? (Check all that apply)

___ Send out truant officer or social worker ___ Phone inquiry

___ Follow up on unknown address, etc. ___ Others (describe) _____

_____

_____.

3). Estimate your **actual annual dropout** rate for 1998-1999 for the 7^{th} – 12^{th} grades:

___ 0 – 2% ___ 2.1 – 4 %

___ 4.1% - 6% ___ 6.1% - 10%

___ 10% or more

4). If your actual dropout rate differs from the reported annual dropout rate in the 1998 - 1999 AEIS report, is your actual dropout rate

___ Higher ___ Lower

5). Do you use an alternative method for calculating your annual dropout rate?

___ Yes ___ No

If yes, please describe _____

_____.

6). In 1998-1999 for the first time, the AEIS contained a district longitudinal dropout rate. Do you feel your district longitudinal dropout rate reported in the AEIS is correct?

___ Yes ___ No,

If no, how does it differ and why do you feel that it is not correct? _____

_____

_____.

7). Does your district calculate a longitudinal dropout rate?

___ Yes ___ No

If no, reasons_____

_____.

8). Which dropout rate calculation would you prefer for TEA to use?

___ Longitudinal ___ Annual

9). What factors should be considered in **developing a procedure** for the calculation of a longitudinal dropout rate? (In order of priority 1= most important to 4 = least important).

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____ 4. _____

Comments: _____

_____.

10). What are the **major problems** that must be solved in order to calculate a longitudinal dropout rate?

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____ 4. _____

Comments: _____

_____.

APPENDIX E

Survey of Dropout Procedures in Regions 1 & 2 Results

SURVEY OF DROPOUT PROCEDURES IN REGIONS 1 & 2
RESULTS

A. Job Title

Superintendent/Assistant Supt. 3
Principal 18
Registrar
Other: Counselor 2 Asst. Prin. 2 Academic facilitator: 1

B. School Population

0 - 500	9
501 - 800	6
801 - 1200	2
1201 - 2000	4
2000 +	5

1.) Do you feel that the annual TEA dropout rate reported in your AEIS is accurate?

Yes 17
No 9

If no, please comment:

- Often the students who leave go to other schools who do not send for records. Some student leaver codes are incorrect.
- The present (1999) 9th graders will not reflect the amount of graduating seniors (2003). In addition, the dropout rate in the AEIS is only a snapshot.
- Yes for Grade 12 but not for campus since campus not included.
- TEA uses specific guidelines that do not reflect actual dropout rate.
- We recover some students after PEIMS submission & TEA does not change percentage unless it effects AEIS ratings.
- We over reported our dropout figures due to a PEIMS error.

2.) What procedure do you use to identify a student as a dropout? (Check all that apply.)

Send out truant officer or social worker 13
Phone inquiry 20
Follow up on unknown address, etc. 20
Others (describe)

- Phone relatives
- Parent conferences with counselors and administrators. Also letters are sent and file truancy in court. Counselors call or write the school where students have expressed an intent to enroll.
- Send letter out. All of the above is done once the fall PEIMS
- Run report for students with 5 or more absences & mail a notification letter to parents; failing 1 or more classes, retained and behind on credits
- Send letter out; all of the above is done once the fall PEIMS
- No show list follow up
- Student who withdraw to pursue a GED but do not follow through

- TEA guidelines
- Send out administrator or teacher or social worker

3.) Estimate your **actual annual dropout** rate for 1998-1999 for the 7th - 12th grades:

0 - 2%	18
2.1% - 4%	4
4.1% - 6%	3
6.1% - 10%	1
10% or more	

4.) If your actual dropout rate differs from the reported annual dropout rate in the 1998-99 AEIS report, is your actual dropout rate

Higher	6
Lower	6
No response	9
NA	3

- "same"
- We have not received the report. AEIS reports contain dropout data from the previous year, i. e. 1998-99 AEIS reports, 1997-98 dropout data.
- Need to clearly define the term "dropout"
- No Comment

5.) Do you use an alternative method for calculating your annual dropout rate?

Yes	1
No	22

If yes, please describe

- We consider the 9th grade enrollment for this year and refer to it when they say should be graduating. This will reflect a more accurate dropout rate.

6.) In 1998-99 for the first time, the AEIS contained a district longitudinal dropout rate. Do you feel your district longitudinal dropout rate reported in the AEIS is correct?

Yes	18
No	5

If no, how does it differ and why do feel that it is not correct?

- It appears to be significantly different. The method used by TEA to calculate the longitudinal dropout rate does not take into consideration students who take MORE THAN 6 years to complete grades 7-12 or districts who have a high mobility rate.
- Our AEIS does not contain a longitudinal dropout rate.
- It differs because it should be higher and it is a one time snap shot.

7.) Does your district calculate a longitudinal dropout rate?

Yes	7
No	17

If no, reasons

- We use the longitudinal rate provided in the district's AEIS report.
- We let TEA do the calculations

8.) Which dropout rate calculation would you prefer for TEA to use?

Longitudinal	8
Annual	13
Both	2
Incomplete	2
No Response	1

- Both would be good

9.) What factors should be considered in **developing a procedure** for the calculation of a longitudinal dropout rate? (In order of priority 1 = most important to 4 = least important).

No responses 8
Incomplete 2
Not applicable 1

- I am not sure of your question.
- I don't feel an accurate longitudinal procedure is possible.
- Don't know but I would like to know.

Priority 1

- Use PEIMS ID number to track individual students and track them no matter what district they are enrolled in.
- Initial enrollment of student
- Accurate reporting
- 9th grade enrollment
- Mobility
- Two rates – four year and six year rate
- Reclaim dropouts in GED
- Each school year needs to be looked at individually
- GED program Enrollment
- Residence
- Consistency among districts
- PEIMS data bank

Priority 2

- The completion rate seems to be a more valid measure.
- What happens in between those years
- Student Mobility
- Number of at-risk children
- Alternative education
- GED
- Alternative education completed (including GED)
- Recovery system follow-up

- TEA state loss surrounding ages for allowable reports
- Health (ability)
- School district log-transfers

Priority 3

- Graduation date
- Students not living with parents.
- Re-enrollment of student
- Socio Economic
- Continuation
- Finding/considering missing students
- Return migrant
- Identification of transfer students

Priority 4

- Available funds and resources
- Expulsion
- Return to Ed possible

10.)What are the **major problems** that must be solved in order to calculate a Longitudinal dropout rate?

Incomplete 1

No responses 4

Not applicable 1

- I am not sure this can be as answered as you have presented the question.
- Don't know but I would like to know.
- Supreme Court Justice White (Ret) quote "the only thing wrong with public schools is the fact that it is mandatory that students attend."

Number 1

- Tracking students across districts and states.
- Accurate count of 9th grade enrollment and when they should be seniors (difference between the two)
- I'm not too sure!
- Tracking students accurately.
- Report to TEA
- Recovery system must be as accurate and complete as possible
- Mobility
- Out of state/country tracking
- Tracking school leavers
- Size of cohort group
- Mobility
- Locating students missing from the year before
- Identifying transfer students

- Paper work (who will do it)
- Out of state (moved)

Number 2

- Where the students successful in receiving alternative graduation
- GED Recovery program
- Accountability
- Clear vision/definition
- Current addresses/phone numbers
- Size of school
- Curriculum
- Accurate figures
- Keep track of students

Number 3

- Expulsions
- Alternative educational opportunities
- Through PEIMS automatically
- Funding
- Political bill to add money to reduce the dropout rate for early intervention programs in probably at Grades 7 to 9
- Mobility
- Too many variables
- Consistency between state and local formulas for calculation
- Identifying GED students, etc.

Number 4

- No Shows
- (Act of God) Difference in school mobility rates
- Student with special needs